

Dr. Rex  
EdReach Message  
May 9, 2008

Dear Friends of Education:

The period of time from the middle of April until the middle of June should be a joyous one for many of our students, especially seniors. There's the excitement of the high school prom, followed by graduation ceremonies and celebrations, maybe a trip to the beach or an early summer vacation before they get on with the rest of their lives.

But it's also a dangerous time. Too often, the celebrations of this season include young people making reckless decisions involving drugs – especially alcohol – leading to driving while under the influence and other behaviors that put their lives at risk. Their bright future can easily be marred by tragedy and broken dreams.

The statistics are grim – more than half of alcohol-related traffic deaths occur from mid-April to mid-June. Nationwide, underage drinking causes the deaths of 5,000 young people each year. It costs South Carolina an estimated \$900 million yearly – a terrible price to pay in youth violence, traffic accidents, property destruction and treatment costs – plus the enormous waste in young lives cut short.

Our schools use education and prevention programs to warn teens about drinking during this dangerous season. Some schools have students sign prom night or graduation night no-alcohol, no-drugs pledges. Some sponsor safe, chaperoned after-prom or after-graduation parties. Some schools have alcohol sensors at the prom door and their watchword is you have to *blow to go*. Others stage mock DUI crashes or display a wrecked car on campus to reinforce the safe and sober driving message.

Earlier this week, we partnered with the [Department of Alcohol and Other Drug Abuse Services](#) and the [Department of Public Safety](#) in a comprehensive push to educate both adults and young people about the hazards of mixing alcohol and adolescence.

Adult responsibility is a key component. In South Carolina, adults who provide alcohol to young people or who condone drinking are breaking the law and could face stiff fines and possible jail time. These penalties apply even to adults who rent hotel or motel rooms or beach houses while knowing that underage drinking will take place there.

A special publicity campaign – "[Parents Who Host, Lose the Most](#)" – has been in place during the past year to call attention to this law and to reinforce the fact that parents are still the number one factor influencing their children's decision on whether or not to drink. Parents and other caring adults need to be proactive and have open, honest dialogue with teens about avoiding risky situations involving alcohol and drugs.

Underage drinking affects not just our teens, but the entire community. We need parents, educators, business and faith leaders and concerned citizens to take this opportunity to

guide young people away from self-destructive behavior and toward a better understanding of how to safely celebrate the special events in their lives. Working together, we can make a difference.

Sincerely,

Jim Rex  
State Superintendent of Education

<http://www.daodas.state.sc.us/index.asp>

<http://www.scdps.org/ohs/default.asp>

<http://www.daodas.state.sc.us/parentswhohost.asp>